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C O N F I D E N T I A L BRATISLAVA 000473

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PINR KDEM LO

SUBJECT: REGIONAL POLITICAL PARTIES TRY OUT ALLIANCES
BEFORE NOVEMBER ELECTIONS

Classified By: CDA Scott N. Thayer for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶11. (SBU) SUMMARY: In advance of Slovakia's regional elections (scheduled for November 26), political parties have begun to experiment with different pairings and coalitions in the "consequence-free environment" of regional politics. At the local and regional level, Slovak politics is based less on party platforms than on the personal relationships of the politicians, which are occasionally born of common corruption. END SUMMARY.

¶12. (U) For ease of reading, Post provides the following "Key" to the political party acronyms:

SDKU = Slovak Democratic and Christian Union
KDH = Christian Democrat Movement
SMK = Hungarian Coalition Party
ANO = Alliance of New Citizens
HZDS = Movement for a Democratic Slovakia
HZA = Movement for Democracy
Smer = "Direction"
KSS = Communist Party of Slovakia
SNS = Slovak National Party
SF = Free Forum
DS = Democratic Party

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

¶13. (U) Over the past five years, Slovakia has attempted to decentralize its government away from a central, Bratislava-based system towards more regional authority. Regionally, there are 8 administrative "higher territorial units," or "Zupas," whose regional parliaments are made up of 40 to 62 deputies. These regional governments have control over roads (but not highways), zoning, development, investment ventures, secondary schools, hospitals, and social service facilities like retirement homes, children's services, cultural activities, and licensing. This decentralization has brought with it nearly USD 1 Billion to each Zupa; what it has not brought is the oversight to see how the funds are being administered.

CORRUPTION MEANS MORE THAN PLATFORMS

¶14. (SBU) At a public forum in Bratislava June 15, Minister of Justice Daniel Lipsic and NGO attorney Vladimir Pirošik described what they see as a regional party structure based on "brotherhood" or "clan" loyalty among corrupt local officials regardless of party affiliations. Reaffirming the point that Slovakia's political parties are based less on policy than on personal relationships at the local and regional level, they said corruption is becoming a more serious problem at the local and regional levels in Slovakia. Decentralization has brought significant amounts of money -- and little oversight -- to the regional governments, and national auditors have no legal authority yet to provide oversight. In addition, local media outlets are often owned by mayors or municipal officials, and thus fail to fulfill their traditional "watchdog" role.

"FRANKENPARTY" FORMS TO TAKE ON HUNGARIANS IN NITRA...

¶15. (SBU) Only a few days after a "Slovak coalition" of odd bedfellows (including KDH, SDKU, HZA, and Smer) was formed to challenge SMK dominance in the Nitra region, the dispute between the two factions has grown fierce. SMK, which controls 31 of 52 seats in the regional parliament, was accused by the new coalition of taking an overly partisan and nationalist approach to its administration of the region, including bias in its personnel policy, its distribution of regional monies, and its apathy towards the views of the minority Slovak parties and citizens. The coalition published a list of 24 controversial tenders and recalls of directors that were orchestrated by SMK, harming ethnic Slovaks in the region.

¶16. (C) In private meetings with Embassy officers, SMK deputy chairman and MP Miklos Duray admitted that the SMK government in the Nitra region is biased in favor of Hungarians, and said that several councilmen had been kicked out of the party because of their lack of transparency. He

told Emboffs that he thinks the so-called anti-Hungarian coalition is probably not motivated by anti-Hungarian animus, but instead represents a reflection of the "bad governing practices" of the SMK majority in the Nitra region (a view we also heard from the regional SMK in March). In his view, SMK councilmen in the region should have provided more space to the other parties and should have "shown them more respect."

...WHILE IN TRENCIN, HZDS IS THE WILD CARD

17. (SBU) On June 11, regional party leaders from Smer, KDH, SNS, HZD, and SF signed a coalition agreement for the November regional elections in Trenčín. The coalition candidate for the chairman of the Trenčín region is Miroslav Chovanec, a current Smer MP and OB/GYN who once notably told Poloffs that doctors don't request bribes for delivering babies, but usually accept "gifts" for their services. The parties also reached an agreement about the number of seats each would receive in the Trenčín regional parliament: Smer 21, KDH 11, SNS 8, HZD 3, SD 2. A potential counter-coalition would consist of SDKU, ANO, DS, and possibly HZDS (the SDKU mayor of Trenčín told Charge several months ago that coalition with HZDS was a real possibility). While such coalitions would some time ago have been unthinkable, the regional elections provide parties with an opportunity to experiment with different alliances in advance of national elections.

UNHOLY ALLIANCE? MECIAR OFFERS ANO AN OLIVE BRANCH

18. (SBU) At the ANO party congress, also held June 11, HZDS party leader and former Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar offered to ANO ("Alliance of New Citizens") his party's cooperation after parliamentary elections in 2006. While the offer was not accepted outright, it was not rejected by the ANO leadership either. Cooperation between HZDS and SDKU has been the subject of lively discussion in the Slovak press, but in reality, none of the coalition parties have ruled out a partnership with HZDS. SMK and KDH have, so far, expressed the most reservations about such a partnership. Smer leader Robert Fico stated that his party is ready to cooperate with all relevant parties, including the Communists and SNS. This far out, all parties are keeping their options open.

THAYER

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